



**QAA**

# **Outcomes from institutional audit Progression and completion statistics Second series**



**Sharing good practice**

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### Summary

This paper is based on the 59 institutional audit reports published from December 2004 to August 2006. Specifically, it covers the sections of the audit reports dealing with how institutions gather and analyse student progression and completion data and the use they make of that analysis to inform their work.

The audit reports make it clear that progress has been made in this area since publication of the corresponding paper in the first *Outcomes from institutional audit* (hereafter, *Outcomes...*) series in 2006. Each of the reports considered for this paper shows how the respective institutions are aware of the need to gather and make effective use of statistical data relating to recruitment, retention, progression and completion. Many institutions are beginning to recognise the need to develop the collection of data and analysis of progression and completion statistics and the benefits that would follow.

Evidence from the audit reports shows clearly that only a small minority of institutions have developed completely effective systems for gathering data and created a culture in which this data is fully exploited at both routine and strategic levels. In most cases, the reports show that institutions are still working through matters connected with technical development and associated staff development, and that many are encountering difficulties in so doing.

The features of good practice identified in this area suggest that key aspects for institutions to consider when seeking to ensure the successful development of arrangements to gather and analyse student progression and completion data include the availability of:

- a single central source of data in which all staff have confidence
- appropriate tools to enable the data to be interrogated in a manner that meets the needs of different groups within the institution
- appropriate staff development to support effective use of the data and the analysis tools.

From the audit reports it would appear that a number of institutions are making steady progress towards developing satisfactory arrangements to gather and analyse data on student progression and completion. In many institutions, however, considerable work remains to be done to enable them to obtain full strategic value from their progression and completion statistics.

### Preface

An objective of institutional audit is 'to contribute, in conjunction with other mechanisms, to the promotion and enhancement of high quality in teaching and learning'. To provide institutions and other stakeholders with access to timely information on the findings of its institutional audits, the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) produces short working papers that describe features of good practice and summarise recommendations from the audit reports. Since 2005 these have been published under the generic title *Outcomes from institutional audit*. The first series of these papers drew on the findings of audit reports published between 2003 and November 2004. This paper is based on the findings of institutional audit reports published between December 2004 and August 2006. It includes a brief section at the end of the paper comparing its key features with those of its predecessor in the first series of *Outcomes...* papers.

A feature of good practice in institutional audit is considered to be a process, a practice, or a way of handling matters which, in the context of the particular institution, is improving, or leading to the improvement of, the management of quality and/or academic standards, and learning and teaching. *Outcomes...* papers are intended to provide readers with pointers to where features of good practice relating to particular topics can be located in the published audit reports. Each *Outcomes...* paper therefore identifies the features of good practice in individual reports associated with the particular topic and their location in the Main report. Although all features of good practice are listed, in the interests of brevity not all are discussed in this paper. In the initial listing in paragraph 8, the first reference is to the numbered or bulleted lists of features of good practice at the end of each institutional audit report, the second to the relevant paragraphs in Section 2 of the Main report. Throughout the body of this paper, references to features of good practice in the institutional audit reports give the institution's name and the paragraph number from Section 2 of the Main report.

It should be emphasised that the features of good practice mentioned in this paper should be considered in their proper institutional context, and that each is perhaps best viewed as a stimulus to reflection and further development rather than as a model for emulation. A note on the topics identified for this second series of *Outcomes...* papers can be found at Appendix 3 (page 15).

As noted above, this second series of *Outcomes...* papers is based on the 59 institutional audit reports published by August 2006, and the titles of the papers are in most cases the same as their counterparts in the first series of *Outcomes...* Like the first series of *Outcomes...* papers, those in the second series are perhaps best seen as 'work in progress'. Although QAA retains copyright in the contents of the *Outcomes...* papers, they can be freely downloaded from the QAA website and cited, with acknowledgement for educational and research purposes.

## Introduction and general overview

1 This paper is based on a review of the outcomes of the 59 institutional audit reports published between December 2004 and August 2006 (see Appendix 1, page 11). A note on the methodology used to produce this and other papers in this second *Outcomes...* series can be found at Appendix 4 (page 17).

2 As noted in the paper which addressed this topic in the first series of *Outcomes...*, while the title and the corresponding section in the audit reports used the phrase 'progression and completion statistics', auditors and institutions clearly interpreted the generic term 'statistics' far more broadly. Hence the institutional audit reports contained comments on the following:

- applications and admissions data
- student performance on individual modules
- cohort performance
- data relating to widening participation and access
- first-destination data
- external data such as the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) benchmarks.

3 It is also evident from the audit reports that in building their management information systems, institutions' first priority was to provide data on undergraduate provision, followed by that relating to postgraduate taught provision. Data on research degrees tended to be less well developed.

4 Evidence from the relevant sections of the published audit reports suggests that almost all institutions were conscious of the need to develop appropriate systems for gathering and disseminating reliable data, and to make use of such data in monitoring, planning and decision-making at all levels. There were, however, wide disparities in the extent to which individual institutions had progressed towards this goal. The fact that there were many more recommendations than features of good practice in this area gives some idea of the general level of development across the sector. Moreover, even in those institutions where no formal recommendation was made, phrases in the body of the audit report such as 'The self-evaluation document identified the use of statistical data in annual monitoring as an area that "need[ed] further refinement"', and 'the team encourages the College to ensure that it and other stakeholders have confidence in the existing statistical information' reinforced the message that further work in this area was needed.

5 The external guidance against which institutions could benchmark themselves in relation to this topic was provided principally by the *Code of practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education (Code of practice)*, Section 7: *Programme design, approval, monitoring and review*. A second edition of this section was published in September 2006. However, during the period when the institutional audits covered by this paper took place, the first edition was still extant. In that edition, 'student progress information' and 'the achievements of student cohorts' were

mentioned under Precept 8. It does not appear from the audit reports that the *Code of practice* was explicitly driving developments in this area. However, the most frequent context for the use of statistical data was certainly in programme monitoring and review.

6 For institutional audit from 2002-06, QAA's expectations of the inquiries it expected its audit teams to undertake were set out in the *Handbook for institutional audit: England* (2002) and in the corresponding template for the institutional audit reports. The 2002 *Handbook* stated that, as part of the evidence to support the audit, institutions were to make available the information sets described in HEFCE 02/15 *Information on quality and standards in higher education*. This HEFCE document provided the initial specification for the publication by institutions of information on teaching quality. This was intended to replace universal review at subject level, by providing current qualitative and quantitative information on a broad range of matters, including progression and completion data for students.

7 A commentary on each institution's readiness to provide this information formed part of the institutional audit reports. QAA's audit report template invited audit teams, through discipline audit trails, to report on what student progression and completion data was available to staff in programme teams, and what use was made of this data. Elsewhere in the audit report, teams were expected to describe and comment on the progress that institutions were making towards meeting the requirements of HEFCE 02/15 and its subsequent amendments. These specific prompts and the information from the institution's self-evaluation document allowed audit teams to explore with institutions a wide range of matters to do with the collection and use of student and management data and information.

### Features of good practice

8 Consideration of the 59 institutional audit reports published between December 2004 and August 2006 shows the following features of good practice relating to progression and completion statistics:

- the proactive way in which faculty assistant registrars support the academic management of faculty activity, and their contribution to quality enhancement across the College [Royal Holloway and Bedford New College, paragraph 215 i; paragraph 91]
- the quality of the data gathering, analysis and report generation tools available to staff across the institution to support quality and academic standards management [De Montfort University, paragraph 334 i; paragraphs 46 and 118]
- the establishment of GENESIS, a highly effective system which delivers timely and reliable management information to support institutional monitoring and planning [University of Hertfordshire, paragraph 204 iii; paragraph 79]
- the comprehensive nature of the University Quality and Standards Profile and the way in which it enables the Academic Board to fulfil its remit to monitor quality and standards [Sheffield Hallam University, paragraph 202 iii; paragraph 52]
- the use it makes of its [Applicant and Student Information System] at the level of the individual student and to analyse patterns and trends in progression and completion in some areas [University of Huddersfield, paragraph 317 vi; paragraphs 109 and 210]

- the student retention project, in particular, its multifaceted action lines and use of performance indicators [Buckinghamshire Chilterns University College, paragraph 238 ii; paragraphs 84, 110, 142, 165 and 213]
- the ability to generate and process reliable data relating to retention, progression and achievement for all students and the guidance provided for staff on the interpretation of those data [University of Bolton, paragraph 196; paragraphs 46-7]
- the design of its management information systems which has enabled it to produce reports to support quality and academic standards management [University of Gloucestershire, paragraph 316 vi; paragraph 129].

9 A number of features of good practice in relation to student support and guidance made reference to the use of other forms of statistical information (for example, records of referrals to counselling services). However, as these did not relate directly to student progression and completion, they are not followed up in this paper.

### Themes

10 Review of the features of good practice and recommendations in the institutional audit reports under consideration relating to progression and completion statistics suggests that the following broad themes merit further discussion:

- data collection - centralised or local?
- management information systems
- staffing issues
- analysis and use of data to inform action
- data relating to postgraduate research provision
- data relating to collaborative partnerships.

### Data collection - centralised or local?

11 It is apparent from the institutional audit reports that before an institution could make effective use of data, it was essential that all users had confidence in the quality and consistency of the data. There was evidence that the use of a single central definitive source of data was key to achieving this confidence. For example, one report identified the institution's 'University Quality and Standards Profile' as a feature of good practice. It noted that the Profile included statistical data and observed that 'the University's ambition to phase out local information systems is succeeding' [Sheffield Hallam University, paragraph 73]. Likewise, in another institution where 'the quality and comprehensive nature of the statistical data available...had enabled it to respond quickly and effectively to trends', a central post of Academic Information Coordinator had been established to assist in providing data to staff throughout the institution [Buckinghamshire Chilterns University College, paragraph 84].

12 Conversely, where there was evidence of a lack of detailed statistical analysis, this could often be traced back to an absence of a central source of easily accessible, reliable data. Thus one audit report cited the institution's self-evaluation document as acknowledging its data as being 'sometimes unreliable'. This was possibly because responsibility for producing retention and progression statistics was devolved to faculties and schools, leading to a lack of reliable centralised statistics. A similar

picture was painted in a number of other audit reports: one described how 'local groups attempted to put together usable data manually', while another pointed to the 'rather variable level of statistical data' generated by individual schools.

13 The audit reports also give the impression that staff in academic departments and schools sometimes believed that data from central sources was inaccurate and/or provided in an unhelpful format. Evidence for this often came, not surprisingly, from discussions conducted in the course of discipline audit trails. A statement that 'The School had problems with statistical data supplied by [the central data management system] in 2003 and had to use locally generated data' was not untypical. The lack of confidence in the data which this perception - whether justified or not - generated might, in some cases, have explained the limited statistical analysis that was undertaken.

### Management information systems

14 Review of the institutional audit reports suggests that the development of effective management information systems, which could generate appropriate and accessible reports, was an essential prerequisite for the effective use of statistical information. Most of the identified features of good practice fell under this heading, with several institutions noted as having developed effective, comprehensive systems making a major contribution to the management of quality and standards [University of Gloucestershire, paragraph 129; De Montfort University, paragraphs 46 and 118; University of Hertfordshire, paragraph 79]. Comments in the relevant audit reports and quotations from the associated self-evaluation documents made clear the institutional recognition that developing such systems was a continuing process that required investment in terms of both finance and time. Even where features of good practice in these matters were identified, comments by audit teams also emphasised the need for technical developments to go hand in hand with appropriate staff development and training - a point revisited below.

15 Comments in a small number of audit reports described circumstances where institutions appeared to have engaged in a lengthy but as yet not entirely successful battle to develop management information systems that were fit for purpose. Thus in one institution 'the provision of good statistical data has been a long-standing issue...which is only now beginning to be resolved'. In another case, the relevant audit report commented that 'the University's procurement and implementation of new management information systems has not been able to achieve the desired level of progress'.

16 It may be worth pointing out that no conclusions could be drawn as to whether locally developed management information systems or those based on commercial software were more likely to be effective, since the institutional audit reports contained examples of both approaches being used successfully.

### Staff support and development

17 As mentioned above, a number of audit reports acknowledged the need for staff development to facilitate effective use of statistical information. In an unusual but effective system adopted by one institution, faculty assistant registrars had a role in responding to requests from individual members of staff to provide particular sets of data [Royal Holloway and Bedford New College, paragraph 91].



18 Comments in the audit reports make it clear that improvements in information systems, and in the quality of data, were unlikely to produce corresponding improvements in quality and academic standards management unless staff were appropriately trained, while recognising that this might be no small task. Thus, one report referred to the need for 'a substantial programme of staff development for relevant departmental staff' as being necessary if the full potential of recent enhancements to information systems was to be realised.

19 Nor was this need for staff development confined to technical matters; the ability of staff to make appropriate use of the data and to identify trends and anomalies also required enhancement. This was exemplified by a report which suggested that the institution in question should pay 'particular attention to improving the capacity of staff to interpret the data now available to them'. In some cases, improving the use of data was sometimes perceived as mainly a matter of encouraging staff to engage in a 'confident and critical' manner with the available information.

### Analysis and use of data to inform action

20 As with the corresponding *Outcomes...* paper which considered institutional audit reports published between 2003 and November 2004, the majority of recommendations regarding progression and completion statistics related to the analysis and use of data to inform action. A number of institutions, having amassed large quantities of reasonably accurate data, were at something of a loss as to what to do with it. Comments in one audit report neatly summed up this position: 'The team observed that [the institution] has not yet identified clearly the intended use for the data currently collected. Its fitness for purpose when the purpose has not yet been determined therefore remains doubtful.' A number of further specific issues can be identified within this theme.

### Use of data to inform strategic policy-making

21 Several audit reports noted little use being made of data to inform strategic policy-making, with a number of institutions failing to take any kind of central overview of the statistical information available. A typical case was the institution which attracted the comment that 'student data is being used effectively in the course-level monitoring of quality and standards, but [the audit team] found little evidence of such data being used on a routine basis at institutional level to support quality management in general or admissions policy in particular'.

### How data was evaluated

22 From the audit reports, the use of data in annual and periodic review processes was more widespread. The provision of some level of statistical information was more or less standard in most institutions' programme-level quality assurance procedures. However, a distinction needs to be made between those institutions that subjected the data to evaluative analysis, and those that adopted a purely descriptive approach. Although this distinction was not apparent from any of the specific recommendations in the audit reports, it became clear from reading the outcomes of the discipline audit trails.

### Cohort analysis

23 A particular concern expressed in a number of institutional audit reports was the absence of effective cohort analysis. In some cases, this was because of a considered decision on the part of the institution not to conduct such analysis, usually because of the difficulty of defining a 'cohort' where large numbers of part-time and other 'non-standard' students were involved. In other cases, current methods of recording data made such analysis impossible.

### Longitudinal analysis of data

24 From the audit reports, longitudinal analysis was another aspect which had not received as much attention as it arguably deserved, so that institutions did not have effective processes in place to help to identify developing trends.

### Comparative analysis of data

25 A number of institutions were failing to carry out appropriate comparisons, either between different academic areas within the institution or with suitable external comparators.

26 Overall, examples of good practice were relatively scarce in these areas, suggesting that there was more work to be done in most institutions. One audit report identified a notable exception of an institution producing an annual data analysis report. Among its many features, this report provided trend analysis over periods up to six years, analysis by both entering and leaving cohorts, and measures of retention standardised across all courses [University of Bolton, paragraphs 46 and 91].

### Data relating to postgraduate research provision

27 The collection and analysis of comprehensive data on research degree students clearly presented difficulties for many institutions. Typical might be the institution which in its self-evaluation document described the analysis of data on research students as 'very challenging'. Difficulties arose in this area because research students do not progress in cohorts, and might be scattered in relatively small numbers across departments. Thus in one not untypical audit report, the audit team felt that it could express confidence in the data on research students where there were significant numbers attached to research institutes, but not for other areas of the institution. It is also clear from the audit reports that, as indicated earlier, incorporation of this category of students into institutional databases often took place only after systems for recording data on undergraduate and postgraduate taught students were well developed.

### Data relating to collaborative partnerships

28 Institutions with large numbers of collaborative partnerships are, of course, covered by separate collaborative provision audits, which will form the subject of a future series of *Outcomes...* papers. However, in a number of cases where small-scale collaborative provision was included within the scope of the main institutional audit, audit reports commented on the provision of data to and by partner organisations.

29 Lack of consistency in such data attracted some adverse comment in the audit reports, not least because this could lead to significant problems being overlooked, and to difficulty in carrying out meaningful comparisons between the partners. Planning was underway in some institutions to harmonise, or fully unify, the partner's systems for holding and reporting data with those of the parent institution. Such developments should have helped to mitigate the problems of inconsistency.

### Pervasive nature of the themes

30 The above analysis is based on evidence from audit reports on those institutions which attracted either a feature of good practice or a recommendation under the heading of progression and completion statistics. However, careful consideration of the reports indicates that the themes identified above were by no means confined to those reports which included a recommendation or feature of good practice. Many of the comments could have been applied more widely with equal weight.

31 To select just three points made above:

- the absence of cohort analysis was identified as a weakness in a number of audit reports where no recommendation was made
- institutions acknowledged disparities between locally and centrally collected data as problematic
- the need for staff development to enable full use to be made of data resources was noted in audit reports while not featuring as a recommendation.

Hence, although the number of specific recommendations in this area was small relative to those under other report headings, this was not entirely indicative of the extent of development likely to be needed across the sector.

### The findings of this paper compared with its counterpart in the first series of *Outcomes...*

32 There are many similarities between the findings of this paper and those of the corresponding paper in the first *Outcomes...* series. In particular, the scarcity of features of good practice identified in this area is evident from both sets of audit reports. By the same token, many reports commented on the need for institutions to conduct significant development of both their provision of statistical information and its analysis and integration into their decision-making processes. Indeed, a significant number of reports cited comments by institutions in their self-evaluation documents which showed their awareness of this need and their intention to carry out such developments.

33 Analysis of the first 70 institutional audit reports showed that a small minority of institutions were making little or no use of statistical data in managing the quality of their provision and the academic standards of their awards. However, no such institutions were identified among this second group of reports, demonstrating perhaps that awareness of the need for such data was becoming more pervasive across the sector. The emergence of a 'staff development' theme lends added weight to this possibility, and is consistent with a greater number of institutions having moved some way along the development track.

34 Overall, however, the conclusion expressed in the first series paper - that institutional practice in this area was less 'mature' than in other aspects of quality assurance and enhancement - applies with equal force to the outcomes of this present analysis.

### Conclusions

35 For many of the topics covered in the *Outcomes...* series, good practice may take a wide variety of forms, and institutions may have adopted widely differing systems which are nevertheless equally effective in assuring quality and standards. The area of progression and completion statistics and their effective deployment is arguably distinct, however. This is because it is possible, taking into account the findings of this paper and the corresponding one in the earlier series, to identify a one-dimensional continuum of development stages through which institutions move as they enhance their capability in this area. These stages might be characterised as follows:

- Stage 1 - little or no central provision of data; local sources using different definitions of concepts such as 'progression'; consequently little use of data beyond descriptive presentation in annual and periodic review reports.
- Stage 2 - central systems for handling data and producing reports, but staff may not yet be fully confident in engaging with the data, or completely convinced of the reliability of centrally produced data; analysis consequently still fairly limited, and some local data sources may still be in use.
- Stage 3 - tools and systems in existence so that staff can obtain the necessary data, and have the appropriate skills to analyse it in an informative manner; however, this facility remains to be fully exploited, generally because of lack of central strategic oversight.
- Stage 4 - fully integrated management information systems producing data fit for purpose, the analysis of which informs institutional thinking and strategic decision-making at all levels.

36 At present it is fair to say that the majority of institutions are probably located somewhere between stages 1-3 and that very few indeed have progressed to stage 4. It will be interesting to see how the balance has shifted once the next audit cycle has been completed. As with many large organisations in the public and private sectors, for the moment data remains a valuable but largely unexploited resource in many higher education institutions.

## Appendix 1 - The institutional audit reports

### Note

In the period covered by these papers a number of institutions underwent a variety of scrutiny procedures for taught degree-awarding powers, university title and research degree-awarding powers. Reports of the individual scrutiny processes were provided to QAA's Advisory Committee on Degree-Awarding Powers, and its Board of Directors, and formed the basis for advice to the Privy Council on the applications made by the respective institutions.

In most cases the scrutiny processes also provided information which, in the form of a bespoke report, QAA accepted as the equivalent of an institutional audit report. Only those reports which conform to the general pattern of the institutional audit reports are included in the list below.

### 2004-05

City University

Cranfield University

University of Hull

University of Leicester

University of Newcastle upon Tyne

University of Nottingham

The Queen's University Belfast

University of Surrey

University of Ulster

Goldsmiths College, University of London

Queen Mary, University of London

Royal Holloway and Bedford New College (Royal Holloway, University of London)

University of London

University College London

Birkbeck College, University of London

Imperial College of Science, Technology and Medicine (Imperial College London)

St George's Hospital Medical School

University of Derby

De Montfort University

University of Gloucestershire  
University of Hertfordshire  
Sheffield Hallam University  
University of Huddersfield  
Kingston University  
London Metropolitan University  
Leeds Metropolitan University  
Liverpool John Moores University  
University of Luton<sup>1</sup>  
University of Northumbria at Newcastle  
Oxford Brookes University  
University of Plymouth  
Staffordshire University  
London South Bank University  
University of Sunderland  
University of Teesside  
University of East London  
University of the West of England, Bristol  
University of Westminster  
Buckinghamshire Chilterns University College<sup>2</sup>  
Canterbury Christ Church University College<sup>3</sup>  
University of Chester  
Liverpool Hope University  
University College Winchester<sup>4</sup>  
Henley Management College  
Harper Adams University College  
Conservatoire for Dance and Drama  
American InterContinental University - London

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<sup>1</sup> Now the University of Bedfordshire

<sup>2</sup> Now Buckinghamshire New University

<sup>3</sup> Now Canterbury Christ Church University

<sup>4</sup> Now the University of Winchester

2005-06

University of Manchester

Courtauld Institute of Art

Heythrop College

University of London External System

London School of Economics and Political Science

University of Bolton

Thames Valley University

University of Central England in Birmingham<sup>5</sup>

University of Worcester

Birmingham College of Food, Tourism and Creative Studies

Dartington College of Arts

The Arts Institute at Bournemouth

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<sup>5</sup> Now Birmingham City University

## **Appendix 2 - Reports on specialist institutions**

### **2004-05**

Birkbeck College, University of London

Imperial College of Science, Technology and Medicine (Imperial College London)

St George's Hospital Medical School

Henley Management College

Harper Adams University College

Conservatoire for Dance and Drama

American InterContinental University - London

### **2005-06**

Courtauld Institute of Art

Heythrop College

University of London External System

London School of Economics and Political Science

Birmingham College of Food, Tourism and Creative Studies

Dartington College of Arts

The Arts Institute at Bournemouth



### **Appendix 3 - Titles of *Outcomes from institutional audit papers, Series 2***

In most cases, *Outcomes...* papers will be no longer than 20 sides of A4. Projected titles of *Outcomes...* papers in the second series are listed below in provisional order of publication.

The first series of papers can be found on QAA's website at [www.qaa.ac.uk/enhancement](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/enhancement)

#### **Title**

Institutions' frameworks for managing quality and academic standards

Progression and completion statistics

Learning support resources (including virtual learning environments)

Assessment of students

Work-based and placement learning, and employability

Programme monitoring arrangements

Arrangements for international students

Institutions' work with employers and professional, statutory and regulatory bodies

Recruitment and admission of students

External examiners and their reports

Collaborative provision in the institutional audit reports

Institutions' arrangements to support widening participation and access to higher education

Institutions' support for e-learning

Specialist institutions

Student representation and feedback

Academic guidance, support and supervision, and personal support and guidance

Staff support and development arrangements

Subject benchmark statements

The framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland

Programme specifications

Arrangements for combined, joint and multidisciplinary honours degrees programmes

The adoption and use of learning outcomes

Validation and approval of new provision, and its periodic review

The self-evaluation document in institutional audit

The contribution of the student written submission to institutional audit

Institutions' intentions for enhancement

Series 2: concluding overview

## Appendix 4 - Methodology

The analysis of the institutional audit reports uses the headings set out in Annex H of the *Handbook for institutional audit: England* (2002) to subdivide the Summary, Main report and Findings sections of the audit reports into broad areas. An example from the Main report is 'The institution's framework for managing quality and standards, including collaborative provision'.

For each published report, the text is taken from the report published on QAA's website and converted to plain text format. The resulting files are checked for accuracy and coded into sections following the template used to construct the institutional audit reports. In addition, the text of each report is tagged with information providing the date the report was published and some basic characteristics of the institution ('base data'). The reports are then introduced into a qualitative research software package, QSR N6®. The software provides a wide range of tools to support indexing and searching and allows features of interest to be coded for further investigation.

An audit team's judgements, its identification of features of good practice, and its recommendations appear at two points in an institutional audit report: the Summary and at the end of the Findings. It is only in the latter, however, that cross references to the paragraphs in the Main report are to be found, and it is here that the grounds for identifying a feature of good practice, offering a recommendation and making a judgement are set out. These cross references are used to locate features of good practice and recommendations to the particular sections of the report to which they refer.

Individual *Outcomes...* papers are compiled by QAA staff and experienced institutional auditors. To assist in compiling the papers, reports produced by QSR N6® are made available to authors to provide a broad picture of the overall distribution of features of good practice and recommendations in particular areas, as seen by the audit teams.

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